

Circus: Taken to court several times

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For some, however, the circus becomes more controversial when animals are brought into the one-ring show. The Culpepper & Merriweather Circus will feature Francis, a black-maned African lion, golden tabby tigers Solomon and Delilah, and draft horses, dogs and ponies along with about two dozen circus performers.

"It's fun, but equally disturbing," Nansen Malin, of Seaview, said. Bringing a circus here "is tone deaf to what the community's values are."

Everybody likes a good time, she said. However, circuses, particularly small ones such as Culpepper & Merriweather, have a troubling track record.

For the record

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has cited Culpepper & Merriweather dozens of times since 1991. The circus has a long history of neglecting to provide its animals with adequate veterinary care, food, space and shelter, according to the USDA reports.

Federal inspectors found Culpepper & Merriweather had put people at risk by keeping large, dangerous animals in cages that lacked the strength to stop them from getting out and harming the audience.

The circus has also been taken to court on several occasions. In 2011, a judge suspended Culpepper & Merriweather's license for six months after she found the circus "willfully failed" to develop a plan for veterinary care, didn't provide proper care for a tiger cub and had a "shockingly cavalier attitude" toward the health and safety of its animals.

The circus has had all kinds of adventures with animal escapes, too. Over the years, it has had elephants on the loose in small-town Kansas, camels sneaking out of their enclosures to graze and farm animals joining a pair of elephants for a jaunt in California.

Disappearing trick

Debbie Metzler, a captive wildlife specialist from Gig Harbor, said making sure everyone has access to public records, such as USDA inspection reports and citations, gives people the power to make an informed vote with their dollars. Until February, those records were easily available online.

"They just up and took them down one day," Metzler said. "The public should be able to look up a record. That can help them make an informed decision."

It's particularly important to be mindful about businesses and nonprofits that are responsible for animals, she said.

Susie Goldsmith, of Long Beach, did exactly that. She had plenty of questions when someone from the circus called her house looking for a donation. As much as she would have liked to support the show's local sponsor, the Long Beach Merchants Association, she said, she can't give money to a circus that uses animals in its shows. She sees keeping animals captive, dragging them from town to town and using whips to force them to perform on demand as cruel.

Tight schedule

Entertainers with Culpepper & Merriweather travel on a tight schedule from March to October, caged animals in tow. Days on tour are gruel-

ing, with early morning setup, caring for animals, preparing to pull off acts with precision, two 90-minute performances in the evening, tear down and travel.

More often than not, they're in a new town every day until the show stops for the final show in Hugo, Oklahoma, the storied "Circus City USA."

"This type of traveling circus is an anachronism," Goldsmith said. "Take a hint from Ringling Brothers. It's an outdated form of entertainment."

After a 146-year run, the world's most historic circus, Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey went dark for good after its final show Sunday. Even "the greatest show on earth" couldn't adequately feed the interests of tech-hungry children or fend off attacks from animal-rights activists.

Captivating people

Goldsmith, however, is no circus-hater. She's a fan of acrobats and Cirque du Soleil-style shows.

"These 'circuses' focus on humans who have a choice whether or not to be in a circus," she said. "But having wild caged animals and even using dogs they refer to as their 'pets' should be prohibited."

Green, the spokeswoman, said circus performers who handle animals are responsible for caring for their creatures.

"When everyone takes care of their own, they're treated like family members," she said.

Green said people get the

wrong idea about circus performers — they love animals, too. She's seen an unfortunate situation with an animal get twisted into a story about her colleagues being animal-abusers too many times. She sees how they care for and connect with the animals. Her boss, circus manager Trey Key, who tames lions and tigers for the show, kisses Francis, the lion, on the face every morning.

Green said Culpepper & Merriweather has been trying to show everyone how much they care for their animals and how well they're treated by letting people see what goes on behind the curtain. The traveling troupe is giving a free talk and tour when the tent is raised around 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday.

Next year

The Long Beach Merchants Association was asked to take on promotion of the circus this year. In exchange, the nonprofit gets to keep about a quarter of proceeds from advance ticket sales, president Karl Hintz said. In the past, the local Lions Club has sponsored the show as a way of raising money for its service work.

Hintz said he understands concerns about how circus animals are treated, but they didn't come up until after the merchants had sold roughly 300 tickets.

"What could we do?" he said. "Our decision was to plow on and heavily consider whether we do it again. Maybe that's good enough reason not to do it next year."

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

Trump travel ban showdown headed for Supreme Court

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump's administration is pledging a Supreme Court showdown over his travel ban after a federal appeals ruled that the ban "drips with religious intolerance, animus and discrimination."

Citing the president's duty to protect the country from terrorism, Attorney General Jeff Sessions said Thursday that the Justice Department will ask the high court to review the case, although he offered no timetable.

The Supreme Court is almost certain to step into the case over the presidential executive order issued by Trump that seeks to temporarily cut off visas for people from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. The justices almost always have the final say when a lower court strikes down a federal law or presidential action.

The case pits the president's significant authority over immigration against what the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit said was a policy that purported to be about national security but was intended to target Muslims.

Parties generally have 90 days to appeal to the Supreme Court, but if the administration waits until late August to ask the court to step in, the justices probably would not vote on whether to hear the case until October and arguments probably wouldn't take place until February 2018 at the earliest. That would be more than a year after Trump rolled out the first travel ban.

Was Montana's wild House race a Trump test? Not so much

BOZEMAN, Mont. — Greg Gianforte spent the day of his greatest political victory out of sight, avoiding questions about the assault charge filed against him on the eve of a congressional race that some cast as a referendum on Donald Trump's presidency.

In the end, though, the Republican emerged Thursday night as Montana's new congressman, a comfortable win that may temper Democrats' hopes for a massive anti-Trump wave to sweep them back into power in Washington in 2018.

Yet Gianforte's single-digit win paled to Trump's 20-point romp in Montana in November, a sign that Republicans will have to work hard to defend some of their most secure seats to maintain control of Congress.

The race ultimately turned on the weaknesses of both Gianforte and his opponent, folk singer and Democrat Rob Quist, making it tough to use as a barometer for the nation's political mood.

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